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President's Panel to Probe CIA's Control of Defectors

By MICHAEL WINES, Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—A White House investigation secretly ordered last week into the CIA's handling of Soviet KGB officer Vitaly Yurchenko has been delegated to President Reagan's newly revamped Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, Administration and congressional sources said Tuesday.

The civilian panel, charged with helping the White House set national espionage policies, was cut from 21 to 14 members Nov. 1, partly in an effort to end a history of bitter internal disputes.

The board not only will look into Yurchenko's flight to the United States and bizarre return to the Soviet Union earlier this month, but also will investigate longtime complaints that the CIA fails to care adequately for many defectors from Eastern Bloc nations.

Changes May Be Urged

According to the sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, the panel probably will propose changes to stem the unusually large flow of Soviet and communist defectors who return, as did Yurchenko, to their homelands. Intelligence experts say that at least a half dozen politically valuable defectors have gone back to their homelands in recent years.

The CIA disavowed knowledge of the investigation Tuesday. "But if that's what the President has done," spokesman Patti Volz said, "we will certainly cooperate."

The advisory board normally meets with Reagan bimonthly to discuss intelligence issues but disagreements among its many members made it increasingly unwieldy as an aid to policy-makers. Reagan reportedly told the panel in a letter that he reconstituted the group so that it can "focus intimately and actively on some of the new critical intelligence problems we will have to address."

The board is headed by Anne L. Armstrong, former ambassador to Great Britain, and includes as members former Senate Majority Leader Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.), former Secretary of State

Henry A. Kissinger and longtime Reagan political adviser and former Atty. Gen. William French Smith.

Critics Step Up Attacks

Word of the investigation added to a tide of news leaks stemming from the Yurchenko affair, whose severe embarrassment to the CIA seems to have given the agency's critics a rare opening to press for changes.

CIA Director William J. Casey, Reagan's 1980 political campaign director and one of his closest friends, reacted sharply last week to news reports of criticism, accusing members of the Senate Intelligence Committee of undercutting CIA morale by talking with reporters about the agency's supposed

In Trouble With President

One senior intelligence official said Monday that the panel's investigation underlines Reagan's distress over what some contend was mismanagement of Yurchenko by top CIA officials. The agency has been blamed both for failing to detect Yurchenko's intentions to return to Soviet custody—supposedly because of his depression over a broken love affair—and for failing to determine whether Yurchenko was a genuine political defector or a Soviet double agent.

That displeasure was conveyed to Casey last week by White House Chief of Staff Donald T. Regan, one intelligence source said. That official

described Casey as "in trouble with the President" over both the Yurchenko affair and the case of Edward L. Howard, a disgruntled former CIA employee who is said to have given the Soviets the name of a prime CIA contact in Moscow.

However, that assessment was dismissed by a senior Administration official with a lengthy intelligence background, who said he knows of no desire by Reagan to remove Casey or other top CIA officials.